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Report Highlights:
This report describes the trade and production of genetically engineered (GE) plant products, the use of GE animals for research purposes, and related government policies in Belgium. An EU-wide overview is provided by the EU Consolidated Biotechnology Annual drafted by FAS Paris.

Executive Summary

The Flemish regional government and agricultural sector have a pragmatic approach towards the import of genetically engineered (GE) agricultural products, while the Walloon government and agricultural sector have a more negative approach towards agricultural biotechnology. As a result of this dynamic Belgium has abstained from almost every vote related to biotechnology since 2012. In both Belgian Regions, crop trials and commercial cultivation of biotech crops are hindered by cumbersome regulations and by the threat of protests from environmental groups. The Flemish livestock sector depends on feed imports from third countries, mainly soybean meal, which for a major part is GE. The Belgian livestock sector does not keep GE animals nor do agricultural research institutes keep them for research purposes.

Plant Biotechnology

Plant Biotechnology Production and Trade

a) Product Development
The Belgian Region of Flanders has a small but innovative plant breeding sector. Given the cumbersome regulations for developing and approving GE crops, Flemish companies have focused on New Breeding Technologies (NBTs). There are, however no genetically engineered (GE) crops under development that will likely be on the domestic market in the next five years.

b) Commercial Production
In Belgium, there are no commercial plantings of GE crops, nor is expected that GE crops will be commercially planted in the next five years. This assumption is based on the cumbersome regulations for approval and coexistence, the threat of protests and limited producer interest. The twelve GE crop varieties which are in the pipeline of the EU approval procedure are primarily suitable for the cultivation in the Southern European countries.

c) Exports
Belgium does not produce or export domestically produced GE crops or products. However, Belgium transships imported GE crops and products to other EU Member States and re-exports GE materials to non-EU countries. The transshipped and exported GE materials are documented and labeled as required by the EU legislation.

d) Imports
Belgium imports large quantities of GE crops and derived products. Given cultivation is absent, the Belgians do not import GE seed. Imports of GE processed consumer products are small as these products must be labeled. Imported GE crops and derived products are mainly soybeans from Canada and Brazil and soybean meal from Argentina and Brazil (see table below). Which share of these shipments contain GE material is not registered, but estimated to be above 75 percent.

Imports of Soybeans and Meal, Belgium (1,000 MT)					
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Soybeans					
-Canada	157	123	157	219	112
-Brazil	242	27	180	59	0
Soybean meal					
-Argentina	391	232	201	246	48
-Brazil	180	26	62	125	20

e) Food Aid Recipient
Belgium is not a food aid recipient.

Plant Biotechnology Policy

a) Regulatory Framework
As EU member state, Belgium has implemented harmonized legislation regarding agricultural biotechnology. The following authorities are responsible for implementation and enforcement of the regulatory framework for agricultural biotechnology:

The Federal Cabinets. An important part of the decision-making power lay in the Cabinets, which directly advise the Federal Ministers.

The Federal Government Department for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment (VVL). The VVL is the coordinating Belgian Federal Government Department in the policy-making process in the field of medical and agricultural biotechnology. The VVL is responsible for the enforcement of legislation regarding feed trials in co-decision with the Department of Environment and Infrastructure of the Flemish Government and the General Directorate of Natural Resources and Environment of the Walloon Government.

The Biosafety Advisory Council (ARB) and the Service of Biosafety and Biotechnology (SBB). The ARB and SBB advise the VVL about the safety of activities involving GE animals and plants.

The Belgian Food Agency (FAVV). The FAVV is responsible for document and physical controls of food and feed. The FAVV implements and enforces the EU traceability and labeling legislation.

b) Approvals
When deciding on a position on a GE plant variety, the Federal Belgian Government studies the EFSA opinion on the variety, the advice of the ARB and the SBB, and other risk management criteria's such as the availability of reference materials and detection methods, and the quality of monitoring. When the advice of the ARB is not in line with the EFSA opinion, the Federal Belgian Government starts bilateral discussions with EFSA in order the resolve the diverging issues. But when the issues cannot be solved, the Belgian Government may decide to vote against or to abstain on the particular GE event. When the EFSA opinion is positive and the advice of the ARB in line with it, the Belgian Government may decide to vote in favor of the particular GMO if the other risk management criteria's are fulfilled.

c) Field Testing
In Belgium, an experiment with GE potatoes (late blight resistant) was conducted in 2011 and 2012 and an experiment with GE corn (increased energy content) in 2012 and 2013. An ongoing field trial is conducted with GE poplars. The poplar variety is developed for the purpose of bioethanol production. The current trial with the poplars is expected to be prolonged until 2015 and a new one is planned to start this year.

d) Stacked Event Approvals
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

e) Additional Requirements
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

f) Coexistence
The two Belgian Regions, Flanders and Wallonia, are responsible for formulating and implementing coexistence policies. In March 2007, the Flemish Government decided upon a framework for the coexistence regulations, which was enforced in May 2009. The regulations reportedly guarantee free choice for the farmer to plant GE crops, and include a liability fund. In February 2006, the Walloon Government approved coexistence regulations, which were enforced in August 2008. According to the Walloon Government, the regulations on cultivating GE crops are as restrictive as possible within the scope of the harmonized EU regulations. The regulations contain possibilities to impose "biotech free" zones, and a liability fund paid by the farmer planting GE crops. Sector sources believe that the combination of restrictions will practically ban the cultivation of GE crops in Wallonia.

g) Labeling
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

h) Trade Barriers
The slow approval process of new GE events by the European Union has significantly affected U.S. exports to Belgium of in particular corn, corn gluten feed (CGF) and Distillers Dried Grains (DDG). Impracticable EU regulations for the Low Level Presence (LLP) of GE materials have permanently affected the import of U.S. rice. Mandatory labeling of the presence of GE ingredients in food caused processors to avoid crops of which GE varieties are planted. This affected mainly the sourcing of vegetable oils, by which soybean oil was eliminated from the food ingredient list.

i) Intellectual Property Rights
Not applicable, domestic planting of GE crops is absent.

j) Cartagena Protocol Ratification
In Belgium, the Federal Government Department for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment (VVL) is responsible for the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB).

k) International Treaties
In general, the Belgium Government has the opinion that the regulations related to the trade and

processing of GE crops must be workable for the private industry and enforceable by the authorities.

l) Related Issues
The Belgian Government has not formulated a position yet about if New Breeding Technologies (NBTs) should be covered by the same regulations as implemented for GE crops.
The Belgian Government rejects the Greek proposal to allow Member States to ban EU approved GE crop varieties for cultivation on their territory. The Belgian has reportedly the opinion that the proposal doesn't comply with EU harmonized legislation, for instance related to the internal trade of propagation material. On June 12, 2014, the European Council agreed upon the proposal. All EU Ministers voted in favor, except the representatives of Belgium and Luxembourg. In the autumn of 2014, the proposal will reportedly be discussed in the European Parliament, and if approved implemented earliest in the spring of 2015.

m) Monitoring and Testing
The Belgian Food Safety Agency is actively testing feed and food imports on the presence of GE materials. The Belgian regulations for labeling, Low Level Presence (LLP) of GE events, and sampling and testing are based on EU legislation. For more information please see the EU Report.

n) Low Level Presence Policy
The Federal Belgian Government supported the EC legislation for a tolerance for a Low Level Presence (LLP) of unapproved GE varieties in feed, but will likely be unwilling to support it for food. The federal authorities explained that even gaining support for LLP in feed was difficult as Wallonia opposed and Flanders supported it. In the end, the federal authorities made the decision as it was within their competence, and they found that there was no food safety issue.

Plant Biotechnology Marketing

a) Market Acceptance
The Flemish Farmers Organization (Boerenbond) is pragmatic and in favor of planting biotech crops, but has also the position that biological material protected by patent rights should be freely available for the development of new varieties. The Boerenbond furthermore points to the resistance of retailers and consumers towards food products containing biotech components, in particular in export markets such as Germany. The Belgian livestock sector depends on feed imports from third countries, mainly soybean meal, which for a major part is GE. There is no resistance by consumers as this meat produced with biotech feed does not have to be labeled.

b) Public/Private Opinions
There is a "vocal minority" against the use of genetic engineering, and most Belgian consumers would prefer to avoid GE foods. The most recent public demonstration against biotechnology took place in November 2013, when an estimated 300 people gathered to protest Monsanto Vice-President Robert Fraley's visit to the Flanders' Life Sciences Research Institute (VIB).

Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach

a) Activities
No USDA funds have been allocated for capacity building or outreach activities.

b) Strategies and Needs
FAS The Hague has indentified the following strategy for plant biotechnology capacity building and outreach:

- Maintain contact with host country livestock producers on the problem of feed availability. Serve as a ready source of unbiased, scientific information.
- Promote with host government rational policies concerning adventitious presence of non-approved GE events and the acceptability of meat and dairy products from animals fed with GE feeds.
- Nominate appropriate host country specialists for the International Visitors Program, and utilize other Public Diplomacy programs.

Animal Biotechnology

Animal Biotechnology Production and Trade

a) Biotechnology Product Development
In Belgium, there are no genetically engineered (GE) animals under development that will be on the market in the coming five years.

b) Commercial Production
In Belgium, there are no GE or cloned animals used for commercial use. GE animals are authorized for use as laboratory animal for medical research at universities and academic hospitals.

c) Biotechnology Exports
As domestic production of GE and cloned animals does not exist, Belgium doesn't export domestically produced GE or cloned animals or their reproductive materials.

d) Biotechnology Imports
Belgium has likely imported semen and embryos from cloned animals. The specific quantity of these imports is not available.

Animal Biotechnology Policy

a) Regulation
The federal government has a joint responsibility with the two Belgian Regions, Flanders and Wallonia, for authorization of the use of GE animals. The Service of Biosafety and Biotechnology has a coordinating role and advises the government about the safety of using GE animals.

b) Labeling and Traceability
The Belgian Government will likely support an EU ban on food products derived from clones, but is not opposed to products produced from the prodigy of clones. However, the Belgian Government has the

opinion that labeling should be required for any product derived from a clone's progeny as it is the consumers right to know. At the same time Belgian officials acknowledge labeling will be hard to impose as the origin of the product is difficult to trace.

c) Trade Barriers
Currently there are no trade barriers related to animal biotechnology. Future legislation could, however, introduce barriers.

d) Intellectual Property Rights
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

c) International Treaties
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

Animal Biotechnology Marketing

a) Market Acceptance
Belgian citizens and consumers do not support the use of cloning and genetic engineering technologies by the agricultural sector. These practices are also not accepted by the majority of the Belgian livestock, dairy farmers and breeders.

b) Public/Private Opinions
For the public acceptance of cloned and GE animals see under paragraph a. Government and livestock sector representatives are in general educated on the subject but are not supportive to the use of cloning. Their policy is based on the public's aversion to the technique.

Animal Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach

a) Activities
No USDA funds have been allocated for capacity building or outreach activities.

b) Strategies and Needs
FAS The Hague opinions that more education of all the involved stakeholders is necessary. Education should focus on the benefits of the technique but in particular on the negative implications resultant from enforcing restrictive measures. This would be best achieved creating an alliance with other countries which use the technique of cloning in livestock farming.